

STATUTORY DECLARATION

I, Father James Saunders, of 167 Park Avenue, Caves Beach in the State of New South Wales, do solemnly and sincerely declare:

1. I was born on 10 March 1936 and am currently 77 years of age.
2. I was Ordained as a Catholic Priest on 22 May 1963 and since that time have always ministered in the Maitland Newcastle Diocese.
3. I have been asked by the Commission's solicitors to set out the substance of my communications with Bishop Malone and Father James Fletcher ("Fletcher") in around June 2002 concerning allegations that Fletcher had abused AH
4. I give this Statutory declaration solely at the request of the Commission. I give this Statutory Declaration unwillingly and only on the basis that, without exception, section 23(2) of the *Special Commissions of Inquiry Act 1983* applies to restrict the use of this Statutory Declaration and the documents referred to in it. For the record, the same unwillingness applies to all evidence given by me in any hearings of the Commission, whether public, private or in camera.
5. My recollection of these events is not good, but I did previously give a Statement to the New South Wales Police Service on 21 May 2003 concerning such matters, which I understand the Commission has a copy of. I have used that Statement to attempt to refresh my memory in providing this Statement, although my independent recollection remains poor. REDACTED
6. I believe that I first became aware of the AH allegations against Fletcher in June 2002 shortly after a 60 Minutes program concerning child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. In the day or days after the television program, I recall receiving a telephone call from Father Des Harrigan advising me that someone had telephoned Fletcher alleging he was a child molester. Fletcher had suffered a stroke several years before that, and Father Harrigan told me that Fletcher was very upset and that he had concerns about his health. I cannot recall at that time being told that AH had made the call to Fletcher, or that he was the alleged victim.
7. I then recall meeting with Bishop Malone and he informing me of a recent discussion with BI who had told him that his son, AH, was alleging that Fletcher had previously sexually assaulted him and had approached the Police about it. Apart from that, I have no recollection now of the specifics of what was said at that meeting, or as to whether I told Bishop Malone about Father Harrigan's phone call. However I expect that I would have because firstly that was the sort of information I would ordinarily make known to the Bishop, and secondly because I probably would have seen a connection with what he had been told by AH
8. Shortly after that Bishop Malone told me he was going to speak to Fletcher and requested I accompany him. I agreed and we travelled to Branxton together to see him at the Presbytery.
9. I again have difficulty with my independent recollection now as to what happened on the different trips to see Fletcher, and to the specifics of the words used, but my recollection is that at some point either before, or during the car trip to see Fletcher, Bishop Malone said to me words to the effect of:

Signed

"if I was under investigation, I would like to know".

Signed

